

## INTERNATIONAL CITY MANAGERS' ASSOCIATION

1313 EAST 60TH STREET - CHICAGO 37, ILLINOIS

This report was prepared in response to an inquiry from a municipality subscribing to this Service and is distributed to all subscribers. The contents may not be reproduced without permission.

Route To:

Return To:

### DEVELOPMENT OF DEPARTMENT HEADS

What methods can the chief administrator use to train his department heads and what should be the content of the training program?

The chief administrator rarely has the opportunity to hire more than a few of his department heads. Usually he must do the best he can with the officials on the job. He must develop them through training programs and through careful supervision of their daily activities. The development program should be based upon an appraisal of the skills each department head needs to do his job. For each executive position the city might outline the general management skills required, desirable personal characteristics, specialized knowledge or experience, and such other requirements as may seem desirable. The special qualifications of each department head would then be appraised against the requirements of the job. Armed with this appraisal, the chief administrator can then prepare a training program that best meets the needs of his department heads.

#### Methods of Training Department Heads

Department heads must be trained in three principal areas: (1) technical training in the departmental field of specialization, (2) training in the techniques of management, and (3) introduction to the broad problems of municipal government. The responsibility for training rests with the manager or the mayor (in mayor-council cities), although outside assistance may be employed to do the training job. Full use should be made of talent outside the city hall, for example, university professors, state officials, businessmen, and others with special abilities that may help the city.

Basically the problem is one of developing initiative on the part of the department head. Formal training programs are necessary to illustrate some of the techniques of management, or to keep up with the latest developments in specialized fields. But a training program that includes only regular lectures or large staff meetings does not have much value. Training is a continuous process, and the chief administrator must use every means to develop a constructive and critical attitude by department heads toward the operations they control. Some of the devices that might be used are:

1. Urge department heads to affiliate with their respective professional groups; to attend conferences of municipal officials in their field of activity; to read news letters and technical magazines; and occasionally to study at first hand the practices used in other well-managed cities.

2. Refer to department heads articles, reports, and other literature that passes over the desk of the chief administrator and that may contain ideas that can be applied locally. Later ask department heads for their opinions concerning the adaptability of methods contained in the material referred to them.

(Over)



3. Encourage department heads to offer suggestions for improving practices in their own and other departments. The chief administrator can offer suggestions in such a way that the department head thinks the ideas are his own. Department heads may be encouraged to attend meetings of civic groups and luncheon clubs to feel the stimulus of public criticism.

4. Analyze the departmental periodic and special reports for information that may provide a basis for discussing problems and methods.

5. Give department heads full credit for improved administrative methods and commend them for unusually good work.

6. Have department heads work out the details of plans for review and approval by the chief executive. The administrator should establish with department heads a working relationship that assures them of a sympathetic hearing no matter what the nature of the problem. At the same time department heads must be encouraged to take the initiative as much as possible and avoid coming to the administrator on details.

7. Support or defend department heads in their decisions so far as is possible without jeopardizing municipal policy or doing injustice to citizens. The administrator in many instances may take the blame for mistakes made by department heads and later discuss the matter with them in a constructive way. Harsh criticism by the administrator would serve only to make department heads reluctant to assume responsibility in similar situations later.

8. Encourage the department head to analyze his own job to see what work can be delegated to his subordinates in order to free him for the more important jobs being left undone. Sometimes the chief administrator can prod the department heads into delegating their work by setting deadlines for its accomplishment. Also, he might ask a department head to describe at a staff meeting a specific situation in which he successfully delegated work to subordinates.

9. Hold staff meetings of department heads to discuss administrative problems of common concern, to advocate a new administrative policy or new procedure, and to make constructive suggestions to the entire group.

10. Conduct a conference-method training course in administrative techniques with department heads. A series of training conferences on administrative management gives the department heads an opportunity to discuss with each other and with the manager the organization of the city government, to find out why things are organized as they are and where the organization can be improved, and to obtain a more detached and objective view of their administrative problems than is possible in the daily press of business. Conference training material and also correspondence courses for individual enrollment are provided by the Institute for Training in Municipal Administration (1313 East 60th Street, Chicago 37). Seven specialized courses are offered in the fields of personnel, planning, finance, police, fire, public works, and recreation, and one general course in the technique of administration. All of the courses emphasize the management approach to the problems of administering city services.

11. Train department heads in the methods of analyzing their own operations. The ICMA publication, "Checklist on How Cities Can Cut Costs" is a useful guide in making such an analysis. Sometimes a refusal to analyze a departmental operation stems from a lack of knowledge of how to go about it, not from an unwillingness to consider something new. If he must review a particular problem, then



he should know how to make an analysis--to break the problem down, to get the facts, to talk with those involved, to question each phase of an operation, and the effort required. He must be able to devise new organizational arrangements or new operating procedures. He must also know how to organize his ideas so that he can convey them to others.

12. Give department heads problems of a general staff nature that require them to make investigations or studies outside of their own particular fields. Such assignments offer the chief administrator an opportunity to test the official's ability to solve problems outside of his own special field.

13. The chief administrator should inspect departmental operations and follow up instructions that he gives to the department heads. Such inspections and follow-ups impress the department head with getting the job done, and also with the fact that he has a personal interest in a job well done.

14. Perhaps one of the best methods of training department heads is for the chief administrator to set an example for hard work that his subordinates can imitate. A chief administrator can inject his own enthusiasm, drive, and determination into his staff, and thereby set the tone for the entire city organization by his personal conduct.

#### Content of the Training Program

What the chief administrator teaches department heads is quite as important as the methods he uses to get his ideas across. Selected for special comment are some of the essentials of management that a department head ought to know. Some department heads may be well versed in certain aspects of management while others may require a thorough grounding in principles and practices. For this reason each municipality must tailor a department head development program to its own needs. In general, the department heads might be given instruction in (1) the general forms of organization; (2) leadership and methods of direction; (3) programming and reviewing departmental services; and (4) departmental public relations.

1. Forms of Organization. Department heads should have some understanding of the various forms of governmental organization. For example, the department head should have some idea of the principal forms of local government, such as the mayor-council, council-manager, and commission plans. They should also know the variety of internal patterns of organization such as organization by purpose, by process, or by area. An understanding is also needed of line, staff, and auxiliary activities and their relationships with each other. The chief administrator should explain the interrelations of different activities and departments in the city so that the department heads will see the municipal organization as a single unit.

It is important that department heads understand the organization as a fluid, changeable thing, quite different from the boxes and lines charted on paper. Some departments place more emphasis than others on the formal lines of command, particularly the fire and police departments. But in any organization the day-to-day informal relations of people working together largely determine the flow of instruction, the performance of activities, and the reporting of work done. The old idea that orders always flow downward through the various levels is a misleading picture of what actually happens. Employees on the lower steps of the ladder may be giving orders that keep the operations going smoothly. The department head may only ratify the decisions although he is responsible for them.



2. Leadership and Methods of Direction. Officials in charge of personnel would be helped if they understood the nature of leadership, what leaders are supposed to do, what they are not to do, and the methods of direction that leaders may employ to achieve their purposes. Sometimes an expert technician is appointed to the top departmental job. He may not be skilled in the handling of groups of people and must learn the job of being a department head. He must now devote most of his efforts to questions involving personnel, the public, other city officials, and departmental policies.

There are some so-called proverbs of management that a department head might best forget. One is the idea that a leader consists of a busy, ever-on-the-go executive making lightning-like decisions. Another is the notion that the top man makes the tough decisions, or those requiring the most technical competence. He should not think that the "driver" is the best boss or that the backslapping individual can get along with anybody. On the other hand, the department head who feels he does not have the "personal magnetism" to be a leader should be shown that that quality is not an essential of leadership.

Can the department head state the purpose of his organization, plan a work program with the available funds, train the staff to carry out the work, critically view his operations and goals so that both adjust with new developments, and make sure that his superiors and the public understand what the department is trying to do? Can the department head weld together a group of people, arouse in them a desire to understand and participate in the program, and also have them feel that they are making worth-while contributions to the effort? A department head who is successful in doing these jobs is carrying out his leadership responsibilities. Personal relations of course color in a large measure the effective working relationships between the department head and his staff. Nevertheless, the demands of the job to be done and the recognized importance of the work are compelling influences in creating a staff of competent, hard-working employees.

A department head can employ a number of methods of direction to build up his organization. The size of the department and his personal relationship with his staff will affect the choice of the methods he uses in directing personnel. A department head may lead or influence his staff by giving orders, persuasive arguments, suggestions, setting an example, and so on. A training program is another method of direction, and a particularly good one because it reduces the amount of "on-the-spot" order giving since the employees learn in advance what steps to take to meet particular situations.

Staff meetings where the department head explains purposes and goals and where subordinates discuss their activities are excellent directional methods. Written communications are only partially successful in carrying the department head's ideas down to his staff. They may effectively supplement the other methods of direction but too detailed written regulations may sap the initiative of the employees, instilling a desire to perform all the jobs according to the "book".

Initiative may also be killed by an excessive number of oral orders, one of the most common forms of direction and perhaps that most subject to abuse. There is a technique to giving orders that department heads should know. A manager of human beings must realize that his staff is extremely sensitive to the tone of his voice, his manner, and the words employed. Oral orders are best phrased as requests or suggestions to prevent resentment on the part of the subordinates. Furthermore, such orders should not represent the wishful thinking of the top man, but should be an oral expression of steps to be taken because a situation exists that demands certain results.



Training as a method of direction deserves further comment. To check on the needs for training in his department, the department head should ascertain: (1) if the employees understand departmental goals and purposes, (2) if each employee understands his job and enough about the work of others to cooperate effectively, (3) whether the morale needs improving, (4) whether the employees are alert to better ways of doing the job, and (5) if the employees represent the department intelligently and favorably to the public. A training program sometimes needs a careful introduction to the employees. A selling job may be necessary; if the employees are unwilling at first, perhaps their attitude might be changed by talking to them individually over a period of time. If the training job is left undone the department head is not carrying out one of his principal responsibilities.

The follow-up is an essential element of directing subordinates. Regardless of how the employees receive instruction, whether by a suggestion or a written regulation, the department head should check to see if the job was well done in the time required. In many cases the follow-up should come before the work is completed to correct a wrong start and to indicate that the chief administrator's eye is on the job from start to finish. A follow-up permits the department head to modify his request if he sees that the facts on which the order was based differ from what he thought them to be. Best of all, the follow-up provides an opportunity for the department head and his subordinates to meet with one another more often.

Every department head must appreciate the need for good discipline among the employees. The job of maintaining discipline may be made easier by considering it as one aspect of direction. Major infractions of departmental rules are generally rare. The tough problem is to correct the numerous minor infractions or the cases where the work performance is not quite up to standard. Discipline imposed by a superior upon a subordinate is trying to both individuals. The discipline that is administered as impersonally as possible may bring the best results. General staff talks, training courses, and written rules are examples of impersonal discipline. Nevertheless a department head should not shirk his job of reminding an individual that he is falling short of departmental standards. But there should be some standards to point to. Old-fashioned scoldings and quick surges of anger should be dropped from the kit of disciplinary tools.

3. Programming and Reviewing Departmental Services. The responsibility for developing work programs often rests with the city official in charge of a departmental organization. Suggestions for new services or for overhauling old ones may come from any source, especially the city council, the mayor, or the city manager. The department head must translate these recommendations into manpower, equipment, supplies, buildings, as well as the dollars that he estimates are required to do a particular job. He also advises on the practicability of proposed regulations, indicating the possible success of achieving the results desired and at what cost.

The department head should plan and administer the public services under his direction by (1) defining the objectives of each principal service of his department, (2) estimating how the need for each service may increase or decrease over a period of time, (3) identifying the key cost factors of each service, (4) setting down tentative standards for each service, and (5) estimating the needed capital improvements plus their annual operating and servicing costs. This analysis becomes the basis for the long-term program for departmental services, of which the annual budget represents a one-year slice. City officials may observe that services and costs that appear fixed from a short-run point of view become much more flexible when viewed over a period of years.

(Over)



Every long-term program of public services should be preceded by a critical examination of departmental activities. What wasteful operations can be chopped off? What new methods would make the job easier? The job of drafting a plan stimulates the thinking of the officials by lifting them out of the daily routine and forcing them to think ahead into the future. It should also push the development of more concrete departmental objectives so that the activities are related as much as possible to the goals of the administrative program. A department head should know not only what he wants to do but also the effort required to do the job as may be determined by the population of the city, its economic base, and many other factors. Standards of adequacy should be devised so that the city appreciates just what level of municipal service is being rendered. In its essence, such a program whether for the short or long run, requires the exercise of a critical imagination by all department heads.

4. Departmental Public Relations. Every department head should list the different publics he has and the best method of keeping them informed about departmental objectives and operations. For example, a police department traditionally is thought to deal primarily with criminals, yet in many departments over 90 per cent of the police contacts are of a noncriminal nature. Automobile drivers, pedestrians, children, home owners, merchants, police officials, city officials, attorneys, civic groups, church organizations and welfare leagues are many of the publics that the police department must cooperate with. How successful is the department in handling its public relations problem with each of these publics? Is there just one general program of being polite to everybody or is there a selective information program that tries to reach each group with the information that can best serve them?

The improvement in public relations, however, should start at home, for the surest foundation of a public relations program is good service efficiently performed by tactful employees. The departmental personnel are the key figures in the public relations program. At the very least they must be reminded to be "on their toes" when dealing with the public, but in some instances a wholesale conversion of attitude may be needed to shift the emphasis from the protection of their rights and prerogatives to helpful service for the citizens. Attractive pamphlets, news letters, and informative news stories are helpful and necessary but none of these tools is a substitute for efficient and courteous service at all times.

A department head has a public relations problem involving his own office. He must organize his office in order to be available to the public. He must not only know what is going on in his organization but must also keep abreast of the opinions of groups and individuals whose attitudes may affect the operations of his department. Speeches and public meetings are necessary evils in the life of top city officials and each one provides an opportunity for stating the city's side of the picture. When opposition develops to a departmental policy or program, then an understanding public can be helpful in arriving at a wise solution.

Note: MIS cities may obtain on request a copy of a bibliography on the development of department heads, and also materials on in-service training of administrative personnel.